



# *Ridin' and Stridin'*

## MoDOT Paves the Way for Cyclists and Pedestrians



The St. James/Maramec Trail offers hikers an inspiring view of Missouri.

High price of gas got you down? Try taking a walk. Or better yet, go ride a bike. You won't be alone. Thousands of Missourians are hitting the trails, and MoDOT is making sure they've got somewhere to go.

Thanks to MoDOT and federal enhancement funds, new bicycle and pedestrian – or “bike/ped” – trails are rolling out across the state. From Kansas City to the Bootheel, walkers, hikers, bikers – even skateboarders and in-line skaters – are using these byways for transportation and recreation.

MoDOT's bicycle and pedestrian program began in 1992 to help the state's growing population of bicyclists and walkers find a better outlet for their interests. The program distributes information and raises public awareness about these popular forms of locomotion. A Bike/Ped Advisory Committee, comprised of government representatives, organizations and individuals interested in promoting pedestrian and bicycling safety and facilities, helps MoDOT organize events and offers guidance on building trails.

While the bike/ped program informs and educates the public, it is the enhancement funds program that keeps their chains lubed.

County and city governments have received millions of dollars to improve and create pedestrian trails since 1992. By law, enhancement funds must be used for transportation enhancements beyond “normal

elements of transportation improvement.” That means they can't be used just to fill potholes – they have to make things better aesthetically or culturally.

Local governments and organizations apply for the funds, which are distributed after their applications are evaluated.

### Safety for Young Cyclists, Students and Tourists

While these trails offer wonderful ways to enjoy the outdoors, their function reaches far beyond aesthetics. Many of the trails help keep kids off the street. Literally.

“Some trails are designed so cyclists can avoid the road system,” says Rick Pilcher, district liaison for MoDOT's South Central district in Willow Springs. “They get people from point A to point B and let the kids ride in a safe environment.”

This goal influences the layout of several trails. Many across the state link public-use facilities, like libraries and civic centers, to subdivisions. In some cases, bicyclists can hop on their bikes in front of their homes, pedal to the local library and never come near an automobile.

Even bicyclists and walkers who don't live in the community benefit from these trails, Pilcher says. One bike/ped trail currently under development runs from St. James to Maramec Iron Works. It is designed to encourage highway travelers to pull over for a breath of fresh air.

“We're planning to attract a lot of tourists with the St. James to Maramec trail,” Pilcher explains. “They'll be able to stop, take a walk or have a bike ride. There's quite a bit to see.”

Some sites on the trail include an old-growth pine forest and the Woodson K. Woods Conservation Area. Add in the rolling Missouri countryside and you have a nice place to break from an Interstate 44 road trip.

Several Missouri communities also are enjoying the practical benefits of bicycle trails. Just take a look at Kirksville.

“We were inspired by a survey we handed out to our citizens that said they wanted more bike trails,” says John Buckwalter, Kirksville's city engineer. “The first phase of our bike/ped trail linked the elementary school, junior high school and high school campuses to the YMCA.”

That was in 1997. Since then Kirksville has worked with Truman State University to link the campus to the trail system, which also connects with residential areas.

**Top: Properly marked bicycle lanes let cyclists share the road with motorized vehicles.**

**Middle: When finished, the Mississippi River Trail will be about 420 miles long and touch 10 states.**

**Bottom: Rails-to-trails conversions are a great way for communities to use abandoned rail corridors.**

## Rails-to-Trails

Aside from safety and scenery, bike/ped trails also offer land-use benefits. In many towns and counties you can find a rails-to-trails conversion taking place.

As abandoned railroad tracks are removed, long stretches of cleared, level ground are left empty. These areas provide the perfect landscape for a trail, a fact many communities are discovering.

The Katy Trail, managed by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, is probably the best-known example of a rail-trail conversion. Spanning more than 225 miles across the state, the Katy Trail receives thousands of visitors a year. And it's not the only success story.

Another successful conversion can be found in Salem. City Engineer Bill Huffman says the concept fit perfectly with available land.

"We had a 4,000-foot length of track abandoned by the Frisco Railway that ran through the center of town," Huffman says. "It didn't take much to convert it to a nice hiking and biking trail."

Huffman says the city used enhancement funds to pave the trail with asphalt. A trestle bridge that crosses Spring Creek will be improved with handrails and decking to make it safe for public access. Benches will be added so people can sit and enjoy the creek.

"The trail basically goes by everything," Huffman says. "It starts at a subdivision by the city park, goes past a retirement home, past a high school and ends up at the new university."

There are many successful examples like Salem across Missouri, according to Ted Curtis, executive director of Trailnet, a not-for-profit group dedicated to creating

multi-use recreational trails, conserving greenways and encouraging walking and bicycling for recreation and transportation in the St. Louis region.

"We have three rails-to-trails projects in the St. Louis metro area alone," Curtis says. "And other sites are springing up in smaller towns across the state."

Bicyclists and hikers aren't the only outdoor-lovers to benefit from these conversions. Since the ground is level, most of these trails meet standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This means people who are wheelchair-bound don't have to worry about difficult access or steep grades.

Curtis says the biggest community advantage to the program is land availability. Real estate is expensive and purchasing right of way for a bike trail can be costly. The rails-to-trails concept keeps costs lower.

"You can usually purchase it fairly easily," he says. "It's a quick, clean way to pick up land for the community."

## Stream Corridors

Another good place to find level land – a rarity in some parts of Missouri – is around flood plains. The flat areas around moving bodies of water provide the perfect locale for bike trails.

According to Marlene Nagel, community development director for the Mid America Regional Council, the planning organization for the Kansas City region, adding trails to these locations also helps preserve the streams.

"By preserving stream corridors from development and providing public access to them,





**Top: The St. James/Maramec Trail is designed to encourage travelers to pull over for a breath of fresh air.**  
**Middle: Truman State University is only one destination of the bike/ped trail in Kirksville.**  
**Bottom: The South Creek/Wilson's Creek Greenway in Springfield provides pedestrians a variety of destinations.**



we're offering opportunities for alternative transportation and recreation while protecting the environment," Nagel says.

Nagel notes a bike/ped trail project called the Heritage Riverfront Trail will link the Kansas and Missouri sides of Kansas City for pedestrians and cyclists when finished in 2005.

One of the best examples of bike/ped trails using stream corridors can be found in Springfield. The South Creek/Wilson's Creek Greenway ultimately will connect Meador Park on the east side of town with Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, 10 miles west.

Now about 50 percent complete, the trail gives residents a chance to enjoy a narrow strip of nature in the middle of town, says Terry Whaley, executive director of Ozark Greenways.

"Several years ago, it was decided to turn the land into a greenway before development overtook it," Whaley explains. "It was kind of a no man's land before that. Now the residents have access to the creek and can really enjoy it."

The path is more than four miles long and includes a pedestrian walkway that crosses Kansas Expressway. It links several different destinations, including Nathanael Greene Park, a Japanese Stroll Garden and Carver Middle School. In fact, one science teacher at the middle school offers a course based on the stream.

### The Mississippi River Trail

When it's completed, the Mississippi River Trail will be one of the longest bike trails in the nation. Stretching from New Orleans

all the way up to Minnesota, this route gives bicyclists 2,000 miles of pedal room.

"The trail touches 10 different states, and Missouri's portion will be one of the longest at 420 miles," says Wesley Stephen, MoDOT transportation planning coordinator in St. Louis.

The trail enters the Missouri Bootheel at Dorena. From there it follows state and local routes up to St. Genevieve. The trail is marked to Hannibal, and the latest phase was dedicated in St. Louis in September.

As with other trail projects, MoDOT joins with local partners to make sure the Mississippi River Trail is finished. MoDOT crews installed signs to designate the trail on state routes, and county and city governments did the heavy lifting on local roads.

"Without the help of the local street departments who put up the signs on their routes, we could not have done it," Stephen says.

MoDOT also teamed up with DNR, the National Parks Service and the Missouri Division of Tourism to make the trail a reality.

### Where All These Trails Lead

Whether it's for recreation, exercise or basic transportation, a lot more Missourians are beginning to walk and pedal their way around town and across the state.

Larry Welty, MoDOT acting bike/ped coordinator, explains, "All roads and highways offer opportunities for bike/ped routes. When properly designed, they can be the backbone of a transportation network." ■

